Fact Sheet

THE GOALS OF US-VISIT ARE TO:

- Enhance the security of U.S. citizens and visitors
- Facilitate legitimate travel and trade
- Ensure the integrity of the immigration system
- Safeguard the personal privacy of visitors

HOW IT WORKS: ENTRY

- Many of the entry procedures in place today will remain unchanged and are familiar to international travelers.

- The new, inkless digital "fingerscanner" is easy to use. Visitors with visas will first put the left index finger, then the right index finger on a glass plate that will electronically capture two fingerscans.

- U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers will review travel documents, such as a visa and passport, and ask questions about the visitor's stay in the United States.

- Visitors will also look into a camera and their digital picture will be taken.

- The enhancements to the entry procedures add minimal time to the process – an average of 15 seconds in most cases.

EXIT:

- Beginning January 5, 2004, US-VISIT will begin a pilot test of departure confirmation systems, including an automated, self-service kiosk where visitors with visas will scan their travel documents and repeat the digital "fingerscanning" process on the inkless device.   Attendants will be available to assist departing visitors. The exit pilot will begin with kiosks in Baltimore-Washington International Airport and at one Miami Seaport cruise line.

- In 2004, US-VISIT will pilot several alternatives for exit and after an evaluation, select the most effective process.

- Visitors with visas who depart from a port where the departure confirmation system is in place must comply. The exit confirmation will be added to the visitor's travel records to demonstrate compliance and record the individual's status for future visits to the United States.

ENHANCING SECURITY

- Digital "fingerscans" will be checked against a database of known and suspected terrorists and criminals.

- The addition of biometric identifiers, such as digital "fingerscans," makes our security system more effective than names databases alone.

- Biometric identifiers also protect our visitors by making it virtually impossible for anyone else to claim their identity should their travel documents be stolen or duplicated.

- By combining these entry and exit processes, and by securely storing the travel records, we can account for visitors who require a visa for travel to the United States.

FACILITATING TRAVEL

- US-VISIT procedures are designed to be easy. The enhanced entry procedures at airports and seaports add minimal time – in most cases only seconds – to the immigration process, which typically takes about one minute without US-VISIT procedures.

RESPECTING PRIVACY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- Travel data will be securely stored, and is made available only to authorized officials and selected law enforcement agencies on a need-to-know basis.

- Environmental assessments have been completed for air and seaports and it has been determined that there are no significant impacts as a result of US-VISIT.

US-VISIT: TIMING AND DELIVERY

- The Department of Homeland Security has met the Congressional end-of-year deadline to have in place a program that strengthens security and facilitates travel for legitimate visitors while respecting their privacy and our environment.

- The Department of Homeland Security is also on track to meet Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge's deadline to implement technology at the primary inspection locations that will collect and verify biometric information (digital "fingerscans" and photos) of foreign nationals required to obtain a visa to enter the United States.

- The entry enhancements to the immigration process – capturing digital "fingerscans" and photos – became operational in 115 airports and 14 major seaports on January 5, 2004.

- Exit procedures will be phased in at air and seaports during 2004.

- Entry and exit enhancements at land borders will be phased in throughout 2004 and 2005. A Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued in November to engage the private sector to help the US-VISIT program office identify the optimum solution for exit and entry systems.

- The US-VISIT program received $380 million for FY 03 and has been appropriated $330 million for FY 04. A spending plan must be submitted to the GAO and appropriations committees for approval before funds are obligated.

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